

"FUDS" DOES IT

The 1960s Atlas missile underground silos were built in haste and abandoned at leisure.

The \$47 million Altus Air Force Base site in southwestern Oklahoma was a case in point, built in a crash program in 1960, then abandoned two years later when a new missile replaced the Atlas in the U.S. defense arsenal.

By the 1980s the abandoned sites were unsafe, possible sources of pollution, and targets for major "superfund" cleanup operations by the Tulsa District under a program called FUDS (Formerly Used Defense Sites).

When the Corps examined the cluster of Altus Atlas silo sites, they found unsealed caverns, 174 feet deep and 50 feet in diameter, in some cases used as garbage dumps, in others filled with contaminated water and leaking hazardous chemicals, said the Tulsa District's Burl Ragland.

The first silo cleaned up by the District was at Granite, Oklahoma, in 1988. The silo and other underground structures were demolished, filled with dirt, and capped permanently with concrete, Ragland said. The project was completed at half its original cost estimate.



The Tulsa District has filled and capped abandoned Atlas missile sites near Altus Air Force Base (shown during World War II).



Albert Trimble, left, and Burl Ragland at the entrance to the underground facility.